

Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. today urged U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald to launch a federal investigation into the exceedingly high incidence of workers' compensation claims awarded to patronage workers at Chicago City Hall.

"It's hard for me to believe that city patronage workers face a greater risk of on-the-job injury than coal miners, steelworkers, and slaughterhouse butchers. That tells me that either the city lacks the necessary safeguards to protect staff, or that workers are filing and collecting on false claims," Jackson said.

"Either case, taxpayers are stuck with an enormous tab. Last year alone city residents paid \$36 million in workers' comp claims, medical bills and disability payments B many to people with clout who haven't worked for years or are no longer on the payroll."

"Beyond that, the review system may be tainted by conflicts-of-interest as lawyers and adjudicators often have political connections," Jackson added.

In his letter to Fitzgerald, Jackson cited the recent Chicago Sun-Times investigative series.

Among other things, the Sun-Times reported that at least 1,147 workers who were listed among some 5,800 names on City Hall's "secret clout list" had filed injury claims against the city.

"Is it coincidental that most of the injuries were reported in three departments -- Streets and Sanitation, Waste Management and Transportation? These departments are known patronage havens and are currently under federal investigation for fraudulent hiring practices."

"It is curious that some were collecting workers' comp and getting city paychecks, while others collected benefits for months, even years, without working a day. These are cases that only the U.S. Attorney's office can look into objectively," Jackson said.

Jackson Asks Feds to Probe City Workers' Comp Claims

Monday, 23 October 2006

Jackson concluded his letter to Fitzgerald: "On behalf of the millions of Chicago taxpayers, I ask that you conduct a careful, complete and comprehensive examination of the city's workers' compensation program. I strongly believe that such a federal investigation is imperative in order to stop the possible pillaging of the public treasury and the betrayal of the public trust."